



What happens to smaller groups when we look at national averages? - full post

Posted on 4 October 2011

On our initial visit to the ABS NSW Regional offices, we ran a small workshop to gather the views of those present (which included people from various government and non-government organisations). One participant raised the important point of what happens to smaller groups when you look at national level data. For example, such groups can include older or young Australians, single parents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, migrants, the disabled, and homeless people, among others. Information about groups that are at risk of experiencing disadvantage can be particularly useful in understanding progress.

This is a very important point and should be kept in mind when looking at national level data such as the headline indicators for the current MAP product. The ABS is well aware that some of these detailed stories can be missed when focusing on national level data. That's why, while we present the national level data in MAP, we also present stories about a range of smaller groups where possible (just follow the links to the commentary and contextual data).

Just to give you an idea what you'll find in MAP 2010, the headline indicator for health - life expectancy - has increased over the last decade for the average Australian, however if you look more in detail, you'll see that there is a considerable gap between average life expectancy, and life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Life expectancy for Indigenous men was 11.5 years lower than for non-Indigenous men, and for Indigenous women it was 9.7 years lower than for non-Indigenous women. So, while increasing life expectancy can be considered an important factor in assessing the progress of our society overall, it should be considered in the context of this gap in life expectancy, which is an area of concern for Australia.

In a product like MAP, which aims to summarise data from across almost all fields of statistics, including all detailed groups or issues would be confusing. Which is why the ABS also releases other more detailed publications on particular topics that provide data that better tells the stories of smaller groups in the population.

It's a balancing act (sorry for the cliché but it's true). The national stories are important as they reflect what is happening to the majority of Australians. However, this doesn't mean that we ignore what is happening to people whose experience doesn't always fit that national picture.

During the workshop in NSW, an interesting point was raised: if minority and disadvantaged groups are progressing, the rest of society also must be progressing. It does make you think about the value of understanding how our worst off people are faring. I personally would agree that one measure of a society's progress is how it treats its most disadvantaged.

Serhat

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Comments

#1 Jasmine Hoansen

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Quote, "I personally would agree that one measure of a society's progress is how it treats its most disadvantaged."

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I agree with this comment and ask the question; how do we treat the most disadvantages? From incarceration statistics, it is obvious we lock young male aboriginals up in prisons. We allow the mentally ill to die approximately 10-15 years earlier than the wealthy and now the sick are responsible for making sure their prescribed medication is the correct one as GP's wash their hands of any responsibility for ongoing healthcare.

The truth of the matter is disadvantaged minority groups only get lip service and the healthy, wealthy and wise make more and more regressive laws and taxes to keep themselves in places of dominance and comfort.

A nice pile of 'rubbish' swept under the carpet of a very rich nation.

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